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# LINK BUILDING THROUGH OUTREACH



## CONTENTS

- 3 **A LITTLE HISTORY**
- 4 **THE ALGORITHM EPOCH**
- 5 **QUALITY OR QUANTITY?**
- 6 **THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF LINK BUILDING**
- 6 **OFF PAGE PERFECTION**
- 7 **WHAT IS OUTREACH?**
- 8 **WHAT IS INFLUENCER TARGETING?**
- 9 **FINDING YOUR LEVEL**
- 11 **REACHING OUT**
- 13 **ACCESSIBLE, ADAPTABLE CONTENT**
- 14 **HOW TO BE A SOCIAL OUTREACH NINJA**
- 15 **OUR FINAL THOUGHT**

## A LITTLE HISTORY

**In a past life, the eBook upon which this has been based opened with a quote (quickly dismissed, but illustrative) that went as follows:**

***‘Keep away from link building. Don’t do it. It’s rankings poison.’***

While the source of the quote is lost in the mists of time, it does represent a good yard stick of how some people were feeling in April of 2012, when the Penguin algorithm first waddled into view.

The algorithm was designed to penalise (whether manually or algorithmically) unethical link building practices that had been a staple of black hat search marketing for a number of years – such as link farming.

As it has advanced, it has also matured and in its most recent iteration became part of the core Google algorithm and capable of devaluing unnatural links as well as penalising pages and sites. For a run-down of Penguin’s evolution, you can read about the March of the Penguin over on the Click Consult blog.

What this means is that in order to succeed online, it is vital for brands not only to build links, but to build natural links.



## THE ALGORITHM EPOCH

**The original version of this eBook referred to the 3.1% of searches that were impacted by the original release and the ‘billions’ of searches that were carried out per month. How times have changed.**

With around 200 billion monthly searches (Google has stated it now handles ‘trillions’ of searches per year) and subsequent iterations of the Penguin algorithm impacting more and more searches (see below), the impact of Penguin even at single digit percentages is astonishing.

- Penguin 1.0 – impacted up to 3.1% of queries as of April 24th 2012
- Penguin 1.1 – impacted less than 0.1% of queries as of May 26th 2012
- Penguin 1.2 – impacted less than 0.3% of queries as of October 5th 2012
- Penguin 2.0 – impacted up to 2.3% of queries as of May 22nd 2013
- Penguin 2.1 – impacted up to 1% of queries as of October 4th 2013
- Penguin 3.0 – impacted up to 1% of queries as of October 17th 2014
- Penguin 4.0 – impossible to calculate as real time nature will mean impact will change constantly.

While Penguin has undoubtedly improved user experience (UX), it has often been the case that when a brand had been penalised, the wait for the next data refresh could leave brands struggling for – at least in the final case – up to two years. The inclusion of Penguin in the core algorithm and its consequent real time updates, means that brands unfortunate enough or careless enough to earn a penalty will no longer have to wait so long to see their performance improve once the necessary audits and link detoxes have been carried out.

## QUALITY OR QUANTITY?

Google's business relies on advertising revenue, the amount of money it can make from advertising depends on how large the potential audience will be for those advertisements, and the size of the audience depends on how useful Google's service is. Therefore, though by a winding route, there is an absolute financial imperative for Google to ensure the best possible user experience of its search engine results pages (SERPs).

It is easy to see, therefore, why Google arrived at the decision to use links as an indication of quality and therefore as a ranking factor. However, this decision was taken advantage of by black-hat practitioners of SEO, who attempted to game the rankings by building enormous quantities of low-quality links – hosted on link farms, posted in comment sections etc.

This gave rise to the aforementioned Penguin algorithm which sought to penalise such practices, allowing sites with high quality links to rise to the top of SERPs.

However, what Google have moved towards is what they refer to as a 'natural' link profile. With some marketer's having again sought to gain unfair advantage by paying for links from high domain authority (DA) sites, an unbalanced link profile also became suspicious.

The ability of Penguin 4.0 to simply reduce the weighting of low-quality links rather than penalise entire sites makes it possible for brands to allow a far more organic link building process and, while link detox remains important, it is no longer so panic inducing for sites to receive spammy inbound links.

While the conclusion of the previous iteration was correct in asserting that quality was more important than quantity, it is safe to say that now – while quality is more so – both are relevant to the building and maintenance of a natural link profile.



## THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF LINK BUILDING

**As began the previous version of this chapter, so long as you've been adhering to best practice, you will have been building your links in the right way historically, presently and will continue to do so in the future.**

It is always the case that you should look to offer the best possible UX whatever industry you're in and in terms of link building, that means you should be putting the effort in to earn the links that will lift you in the SERPs.

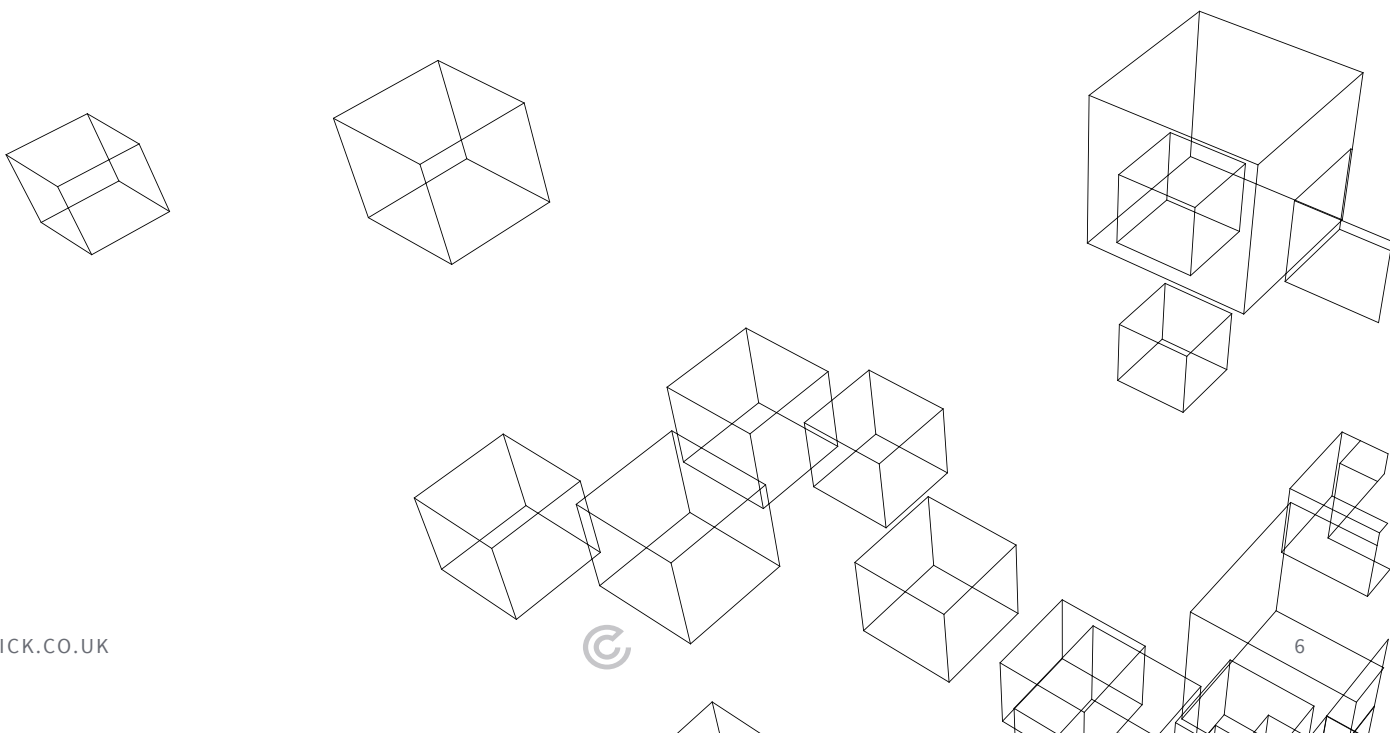
Sites with great content, which load fast, are easy to navigate and that deliver a fantastic UX will get links – so while it is no quick process, all areas of a brand's online presence should be consumer focused and link-building is no different.

## OFF PAGE PERFECTION

Along with around 200 other factors, link building is a vital part of the strategy required to improve your brand's online visibility. While your UX may be as close to perfect as you can reasonably get it and while we believe that the best sites will inevitably earn links, it can be a long process if one is to wait for a sufficient number of links to occur by chance to raise a site through the rankings.

Therefore, and bearing Penguin always in mind, it is necessary – and grows ever more so – for brands to find a method able to earn links faster while retaining a natural link profile which is both Penguin proof and capable of making real and immediate impact on a brand's online visibility.

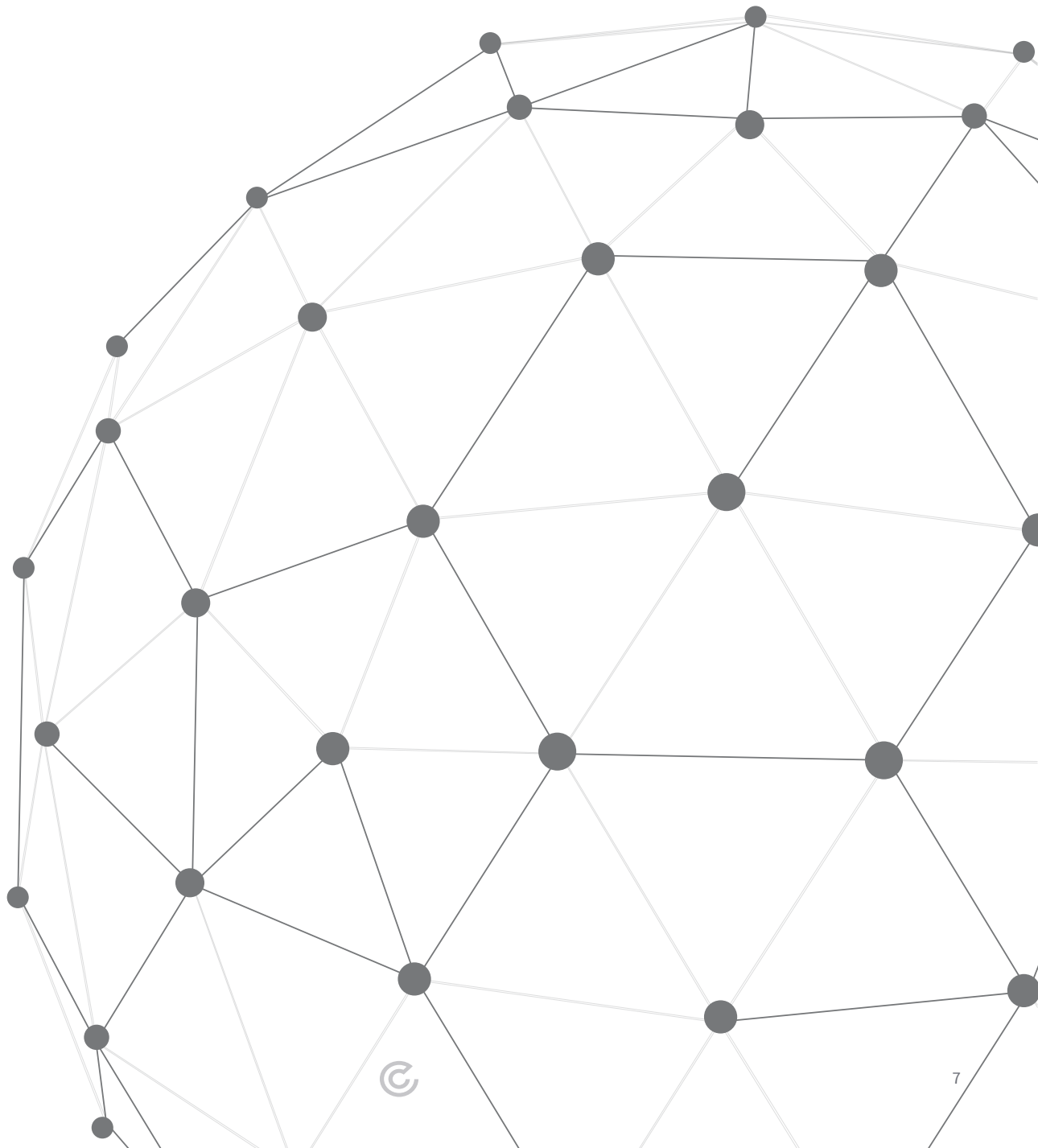
That method is 'outreach', a strategy that can work safely for your overall brand, online reputation and site visibility.



## WHAT IS OUTREACH?

Outreach is a process incorporating a number of different skill sets – design, copy, relationship building and more – but what will be the most commonly recognised description is the dissemination of content through online influencers for the purpose of generating links (the technique that essentially gave rise to ‘content marketing’).

An outreach strategy seeks to extend the reach of content to a broader audience, drive traffic to your site and hopefully earn a broad range of safe links from a wide range of DAs. It looks to do this by approaching online communities, social media networks, bloggers, the press and other industry relevant parties – or ‘influencers’.



## WHAT IS INFLUENCER TARGETING?

Influencer targeting shares a lot in common with keyword research, in fact it should really stem directly from it. Across your site, you will be targeting specific industry keywords with product and service descriptions, blogs or other forms of content, headers, meta-descriptions and so on. If all is well, you should therefore have some kind of keyword strategy document – a list of what keywords you're targeting and for what part of the site, product or service for which they are being targeted.

This list – while unwieldy – with editing and prioritisation can serve as a fantastic resource for influencer targeting. The reason for this is that the appropriate influencer is likely to be targeting the same set of important keywords as your brand, and happily, there are plenty of tools that allow you to search specifically for those keywords prior to approaching your ideal candidates.

Though, obviously, as an expert in your industry, there may be key industry influencers that you would add to your dream team for brand promotion – and we would certainly encourage you to approach them. However, the better known the influencer, the more likely they will be to have been inundated with requests similar to your own.

The best way to approach this is to think of your list of industry superstars, the top of the pile desirable influencers as a kind of 'work-in-progress'. There will come a time when you will work with them, it may (in exceptional circumstances) come from the first contact, but in most cases they will remain an aspiration.

Instead target influencers with a similar status to that of your own brand. While agencies may have relationships with high-profile influencers that they can begin to employ immediately, if a brand is starting out in social outreach, it is best to start at an appropriate level.



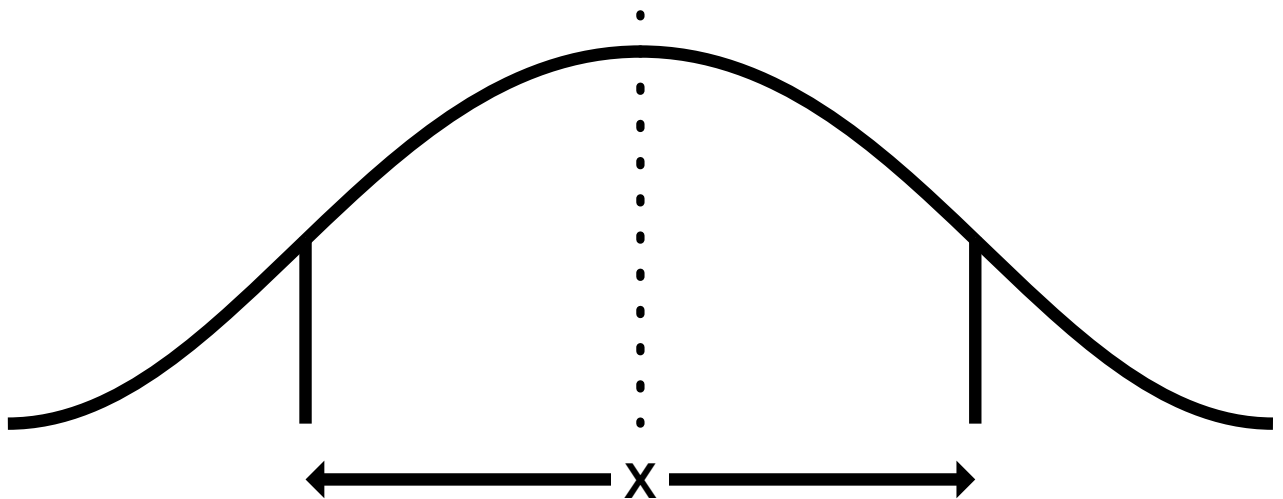


## FINDING YOUR LEVEL

For lack of a better known paradigm, I'm going to employ a football metaphor. Think of your industry as the English Premier League and industry influencers as transfer targets. In order to ensure the progress of your team, you need to ensure you're capturing the best talent you can.

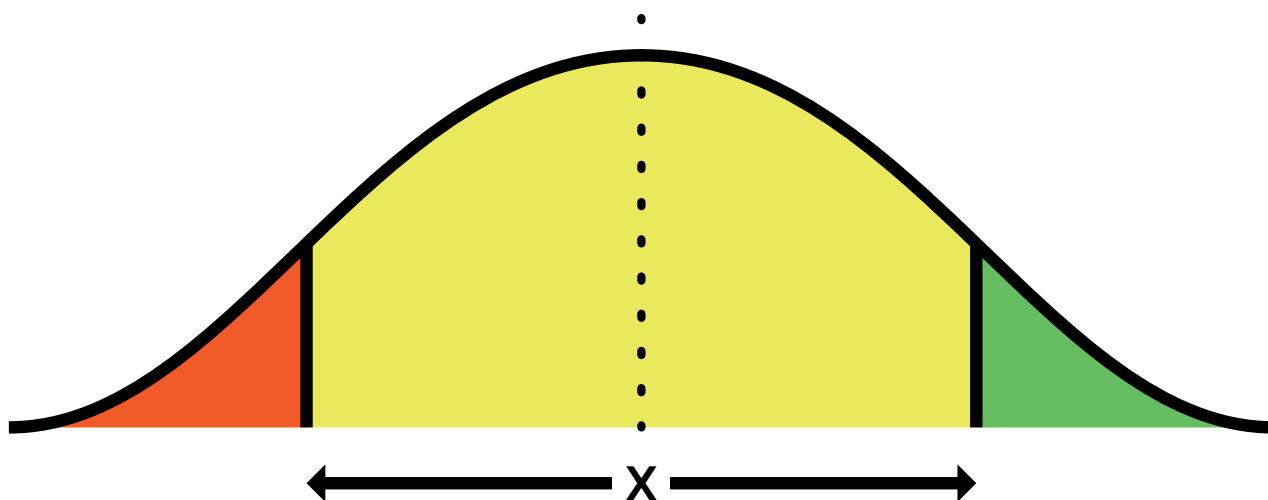
However, it is never a level playing field – and unless your team is already at the top of the league, the chances are you will have to look for talent that isn't already on the radar of your competitors.

This means looking for up-and-coming talent and talent that currently plays at a similar level to you.



Think of your brand on a bell curve – while your position is X, the desirability of the influencer increases to the right, along with their esteem in the industry and vice versa, decreasing desirability and esteem to the left. Your curve represents your ability to harness their influence versus the desirability of that influence.

With social outreach, the best way of reaching a more desirable influencer is by shifting the position of X to the right and therefore the attractiveness of your brand to influencers (hence why Apple has no shortage of bloggers seeking to work with them at the launch of a new product). As this is tough to achieve in the short term, it is therefore best to target influencers around the top of the curve.



In this instance, that means looking to focus on influencers in this (albeit arbitrarily selected) pale green area.

Things to consider when deciding on your position along the access, and therefore your target range, will be your site's DA, your brand's audience on each platform and your average reach on each, your general rate of link accrual and your position in SERPs for key terms. By comparing this to the same factors of potential targets (you can implement basic 1-10 or 1-100 scoring systems for each data point for a total desirability score, and different attainability multipliers above and below your own position in the rankings to achieve an actual workable curve based on desirability vs attainability by plotting a total score), you will be able to increase your rate of success when approaching influencers.

While we wouldn't discourage brands from reaching out to influencers in the green area (low attainability vs high desirability) as the quality of the content will at least contribute to influencer decisions, equally don't dismiss approaches from the red area – as those who are there now may well be in the green next time around. Whatever is done with these two outlying areas, however, it is still better to focus the main bulk of your efforts on the yellow section.

## REACHING OUT

Once you have decided on your list of primary targets for contact, the next stage is to actually approach them. This is probably the most difficult part of the process and comes with a variety of pitfalls. It is important to remember that you are aiming to build relationships with influencers, and that you will not be the only one seeking to do so.

With this in mind, it can be tempting to try to explain everything in the initial email – what you want, how you think it will benefit you and them, what the process will involve, how great your content is, and on and on. However, what people often forget is that time is at a premium – while you may have the best proposition, it may not even be read if the influencer sees a wall of text in an initial communication.

To that end, make your first email simple, to the point and interesting – think of it like a PPC add, with a restricted two or three lines, send a call to action that tempts the recipient into responding. Your first message should seek to intrigue, not seal the deal.

Therefore, if you've been impressed with the work of Joe Blogs, he occupies a good position in your curve and is relevant to your industry drop a simple message seeking only to initiate a dialogue.

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*Dear Mr. Blogs,  
Having researched bloggers that write about [x], I've come across your work and been impressed – I have a project I'd be keen to work together on. Please respond if you'd like to have a chat to see if there's a way we can arrange this.  
Yours,  
Person A (Company Y)*

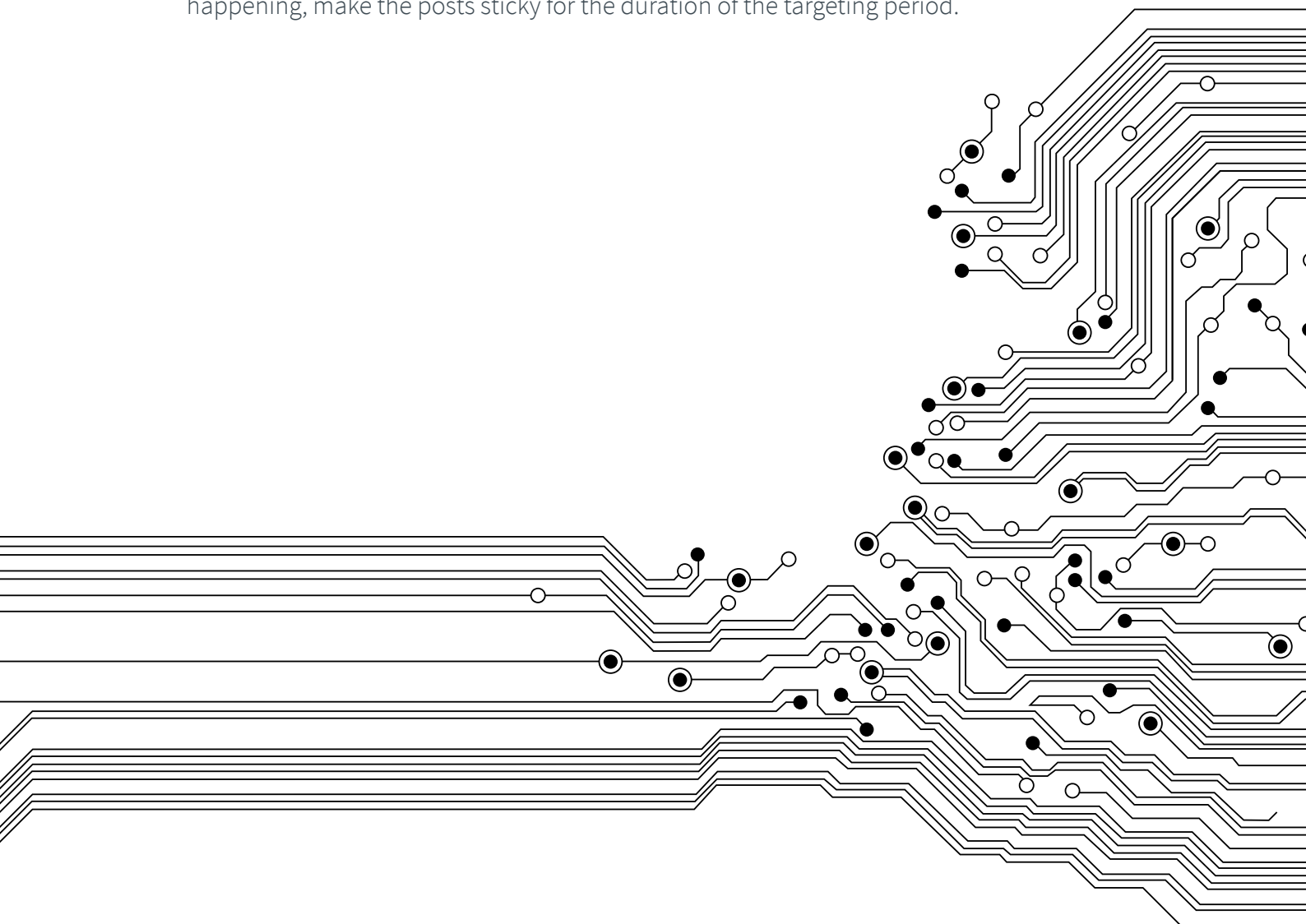
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Once you receive a reply, then you can look to begin making the case for collaboration, discuss content, compliment their past work – tell them what you've enjoyed and how you can add value to what they do. Remember that they have other options and that it needs to be an exchange of value, if people see the benefits as too one-sided they are unlikely to participate.

Another problem that can arise with attempting to engage influencers is a lack of attention paid to their own positioning. It's important that the content, which you're looking for them to work with you on disseminating, must gel with their own branding – so ensure you read their blogs, mention their past work when discussing projects you can work on together (I think this would work a little like your blog on [x] from back in [y]).

Remember that, while they may not feel drawn to your first proposal, it is a relationship with the influencer that will benefit you the most in the long run. Share their content, keep in touch and pitch them your next piece of content too, show them that your request to work with them is based on respect for their work, not just on what they can do for you. Someone who feels genuinely valued by you will be far more receptive to working with you. However, even if they do agree to work with you first time, maintain contact – check in with them from time to time and listen to them if they have any of their own suggestions.

Be receptive, too – if there's a project you're working on, push a call-to-action across the social platforms you're focused on, with the right hashtags and wording you may be approached by bloggers you hadn't yet considered and to ensure best visibility and increase the chances of this happening, make the posts sticky for the duration of the targeting period.



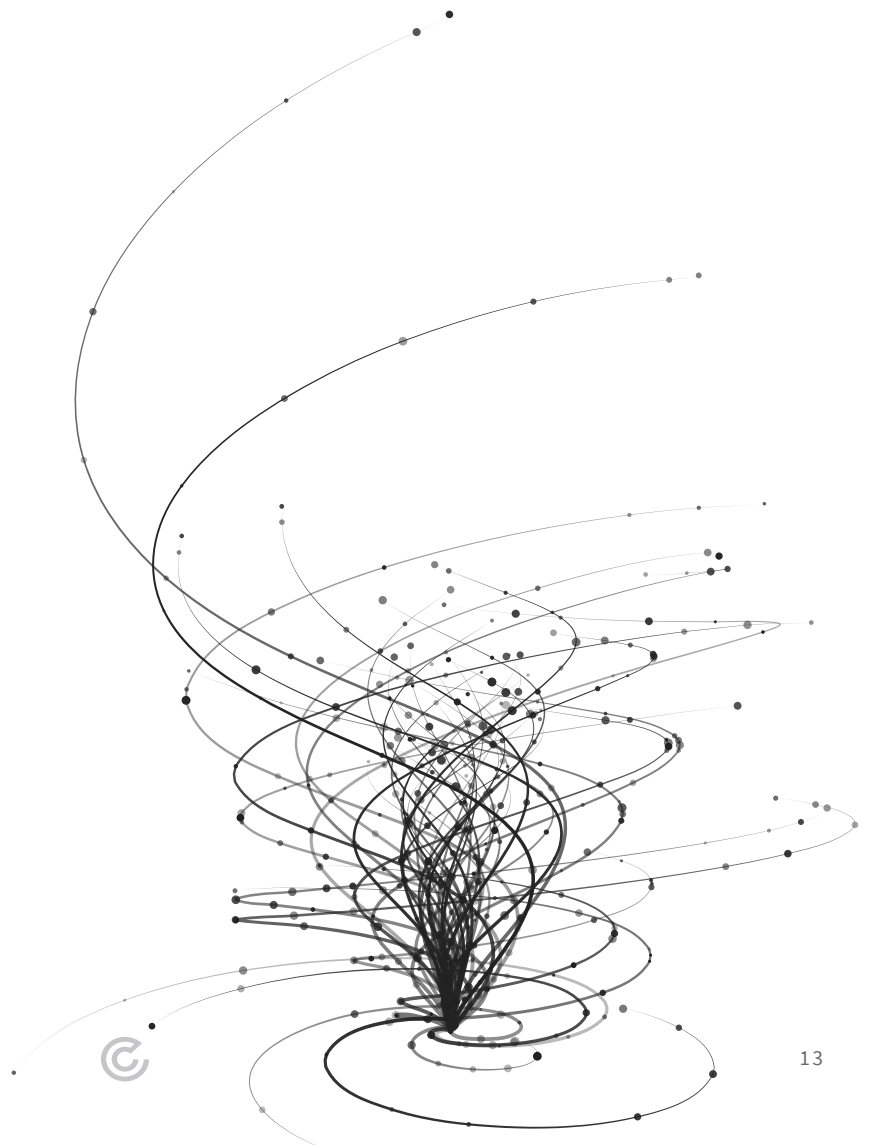
## ACCESSIBLE, ADAPTABLE CONTENT

While in some cases it is best to have influencer input into the content you're hoping for them to help you promote, it is more often than not beneficial to have something waiting – meaning that your design team can be working while you're engaging with the influencers.

This does mean, however, that the content should be easy to adapt to various audiences – if you're working on a project with ten bloggers, you don't want to have to create assets from the ground up for each of them, instead you need a more generic basis which can be personalised or segmented by the interests of your influencer's audience.

Again, by having a versatile and adaptable approach with your content, you open up a level of trust with your target influencers – allowing them to feel that you are both well prepared and open to their input and feedback while being able to harness their understanding of their audience to make the content more relevant to it and therefore more likely to achieve the targets you have set it.

Equally, don't over-brand your content – influencers work hard to build their audience and will fear losing it if they appear to be actively promoting specific brands and therefore losing their objectivity, so while you don't want to make your brand invisible, it's worth not pushing it too hard either.



## HOW TO BE A SOCIAL OUTREACH NINJA

TARGET THE RIGHT  
INFLUENCERS

BE FLEXIBLE  
AIM TO ASSIST CONTACTS,  
HELP THEM TO HELP YOU

TREAD SOFTLY  
DON'T MAKE DEMANDS, EARN  
ENGAGEMENT

KEEP IT SHARP  
KEEP CONTENT SHORT  
AND TO THE POINT

MAKE IT STICKY  
KEEP GTA POSTS AT THE  
TOP OF FEED



## OUR FINAL THOUGHT

Link building is no easy task, and Penguin has removed any potential back-doors that could be used by the unscrupulous, yet that is how it should be. The world of search marketing needed to be encouraged to push towards a more creative, ethical model of marketing.

Outreach strategies, too, are part of this process – requiring exceptional content and the building of relationships in order to improve visibility. Digital marketing has, as such, become a creative force and a positive influence on the digital landscape.

In fact, the conclusion drawn last time around remains just as relevant today:

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***“Creativity has been at the forefront of marketing for decades, with the best campaigns catching the eye and really making people think.***

***By injecting some of that creativity into your content and outreach strategy you can potentially earn great links and help ensure your content gets seen by the right audience, attracting the right kind of traffic and engaging with online communities that are willing to share everything unique and interesting about your brand.”***

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# GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY

## ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi-award winning search agency and winner of the FSB's Digital and Social Media Business Award 2016. Working with SMEs, we turn social media and content marketing into measurable returns on a brand's budget.

Our [website](#) features a comprehensive [resource](#) page, full of useful eBooks and actionable insights. We also write a [blog](#), where you can find an abundance of search marketing tips.

If you're feeling social, get in touch on [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

To find out how we can help you to grow your business and strengthen your search profile with social media, call us today on

**0845 205 0292**

## WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY

*"From the outset of the project, Click Consult clearly understood our business objectives and formulated a search strategy that would help to deliver commercial results across key product areas. They have been professional in their approach, shown great attention to detail and the results achieved to date have been thoroughly impressive. We are looking forward to a successful future partnership."*

**LloydsPharmacy Online Doctor**

*"Click have really stepped up to the plate when it comes to performance marketing, their tenacity and desire to help us as a company improve is second to none. They're always offering up the best in cost per lead performance, which is seeing our ROI on digital marketing grow exponentially as our relationship goes on. Brilliant project planners, superb project delivery and results to boot, what more could you ask for?"*

**Adjustamatic Beds**

## OUR ACCREDITATIONS



Accredited  
Professional



CERTIFIED  
PARTNER

## OUR TECHNOLOGIES

monitor **TRAX**<sup>™</sup> rank **TRAX**<sup>™</sup> feed **TRAX**<sup>™</sup> link **TRAX**<sup>™</sup> pro **TRAX**<sup>™</sup>



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